

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 19, 1997**

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### **Cellular Telephones Available for Victims**

#### ***County-wide Program Announced to Provide Additional Protection for Victims***

Continued efforts by San Diego County law enforcement agencies to protect the victims of domestic violence and stalking took a major step forward today with the announcement of a cellular phone loan program sponsored by local businesses and community groups.

The Sheriff's Department and the San Diego Police Department have received 52 cell phones each. A victim who meets the criteria will receive a phone that can be used in the event of a domestic violence or stalking emergency. The phones have been programmed to automatically dial a special designated domestic violence number that rings in the respective agency's communications center, which will dispatch officers to the emergency according to its established procedures.

"These cellular phones are not bullet proof," says San Diego City Attorney Casey Gwinn, who also is president of the San Diego Domestic Violence council, which is a strong backer of the cell phone program. "However, for those victims who are in severe danger," adds Gwinn, "these phones could be their lifeline. When it comes to these kinds of crimes, every second counts. An emergency call placed by one of these phones could very well be the call that saves a victim's life."

There is no program cost to victims or participating law enforcement agencies. GTE is providing one of the most essential elements of the program: the air time. The phones are provided by and will be maintained by All-State Cellular. The Burglar and Fire Alarm Association (BFAA) donated the necessary phone lines at the Sheriff's communication center (the San Diego Police Department already had a line available that could be dedicated to these cellular phones.) And the City of San Diego Women Employees Association is donating funds for any future training needs the two agencies might have.

It is this kind of community involvement that the District Attorney Paul Pfingst says should provide a wake-up call for the people who commit these crimes. "The thugs and stalkers who may be thinking about victimizing helpless people are now at greater risk because of this innovative use of technology." Ads Pfingst: "The people committing these crimes will be at greater risk of arrest and severe punishment."

The program is designed for the most serious cases, including threats of death and stalking. Detectives will determine whether a specific victim qualified for a loaned cellular telephone. Among the criteria: a victim must have a domestic violence assault case on file with the appropriate law enforcement agency and must not be living with the abuser. History of violence and threats by the perpetrator are other considerations to be used in identifying victims eligible to receive one of the specially-programmed phones.

Sheriff Bill Kolender and San Diego Chief of Police Jerry Sanders have high praise for the program and its roots in the community. "The 52 phones assigned to the Sheriff's Department," says Kolender, "will provide a greater sense of security for victims county-wide who are seeking protection against abusers." Adds Sanders: "This is a prime example of Community Policing -- citizens and local businesses working with law enforcement to find solutions to crime problems."

Under the program,, a cell phone will be loaned to a qualifying victim for 30 days. A detective will be in regular contact with the victim and will have the discretion to continue the loan of the phone for a longer period, if circumstances dictate.

If successful, this pilot project could expand county-wide

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